

Civic groups promote fathering

Heartland activities make it easier for men to be more active dads

■ BY ANG YIYING

IT IS happening at the grassroots – a groundswell of activities aimed at getting men to embrace daddyhood.

From Braddell Heights and Queenstown to Woodlands, fathers have in the past year been picking up parenting tips, learning to cook a family meal and even playing the drums with their children.

They have been doing this in classes or through activities organised by “family life champions” – grassroots leaders who promote the cause with the support of the People’s Association (PA).

A dozen grassroots fathering groups are now up and running, up from one in late 2008. Their mission: to egg men on into being engaged with their families.

In the last six months alone, a Fathers Action Network and a programme called Fathers@School have been set up. The first is a work group of the National Family Council which organises activities that help dads to bond with their children, and the second is a Government-funded programme to get dads more involved in their children’s school lives.

There is good reason these efforts are being made. A survey by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports last year concluded that fathers here are not as big a part of their children’s lives as would be ideal.

The survey found that fewer than three in 10 parents who attend school activities such as parent-teacher meetings or parent-child school camps are fathers. Another survey showed that their wives are the ones picking up the slack in the parenting department.

In his Chinese New Year message this year, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the call to fathers to step up to the plate was a message “worth reiterating”.

And if activities proclaiming that message are happening in people’s backyard, said the director of PA’s family life and active ageing division Joan Pereira, they will be that much harder to miss.

“If you bring things closer to them, you remove their excuses about the lack of time,” she said.

So groups of dads, sometimes with their families in tow, have been meeting weekly or monthly in their neighbourhood community clubs.

In Woodlands, dads and their children have formed a percussion group called Woodlands ComBeatz under the tutelage of five instructors. At just a month old,

the 24-strong group rocked audiences with a rhythmic performance on drums and shakers at a community event on the Labour Day weekend.

Mr Kelvin Lee, 34, head of department in a private school, sees the percussion sessions with his son, eight, and daughter, five, as his special time with them, when they talk about rhythm and music.

At Braddell Heights, some dads are learning to cook, in the hope of whipping up edible meals for their families. A non-threatening atmosphere prevails in class, where most are kitchen novices and nobody is afraid to ask questions.

Interior designer Simon Lim, 46, can now serve up Hokkien noodles, fried mee sua and spicy fried chicken. He has come a long way from the meal he tried to cook for the family, the one that was “a disaster of sorts” because he took too long to do it.

His daughter Nicolette, 18, said her father now cooks a lot better, and even comes up with his own recipes or adapts recipes to make “fusion food”.

Mr Lim Soon Hock, who chairs the National Family Council and the non-profit Centre for Fathering, said the formation of such groups is encouraging. He added: “In contemporary Singapore, more women work, so there’s a greater need for fathers to help their wives, the mothers.”

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Chef Poh Tsu Tee demonstrating how to cook Hainanese curry chicken to Braddell Heights Men’s Cooking Interest Group members, most of whom are kitchen novices, and nobody is afraid to ask questions. PHOTO: BRADDELL HEIGHTS MEN’S COOKING INTEREST GROUP

Helping men become better dads

■ Daddies Club, Queenstown

Formed in April last year, the club has meetings at which fathers interact and trade parenting tips.

It also organises family trips and activities.

Among its events: a session where fathers brewed tea, including *teh tarik*, for their families.

Families have also come together for bingo games and a group outing to Kukup in Johor.

■ Good Men Club, Bukit Batok East

Formed in July last year, this club hopes to make good men out of fathers by giving them new skills and organising events so they can bond with their families.

The club has, for instance, taught its members to use Facebook so they can understand their children better; it has also taught dads how to cook and organised father-children golf games.